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Report Links Iran to Embassy Blast

Associated Press

U.S. intelligence has evidence linking Iran with the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut April 18, CBS News said yesterday.

According to CBS, administration sources said that, a few days before the bombing in which 17 Americans died, a series of cables was sent from the Iranian Foreign Ministry in Tehran to the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, Syria, and was intercepted by U.S. intelligence before the bombing.

One cable approved a \$25,000 payment for a terrorist attack against an unidentified installation in Beirut, and another directed the Iranian Embassy to assist 12 Iranians in passing through Damascus on their way to Beirut shortly before the bombing, CBS said.

An administration source told the Associated Press that he could not verify the CBS report, but that the U.S. government has suspected Iranian involvement in the bombing.

Another administration source said U.S. intelligence officials in the field "have seen nothing to contradict" the report. Both sources declined to be identified.

Phil Covington, a State Department spokesman, said the issue "falls within the sphere of intelligence matters, and we don't comment on them."

The embassy explosion killed 63 persons: 17 Americans, 32 local embassy staffers and 14 visa applicants and passersby.

There is no clear picture of how the attack was carried out, but most accounts said a terrorist drove a truck filled with explosives into the compound and died in the blast.

Responsibility for the attack was claimed by the Islamic Jihan Organization, a little-known terrorist group seen by U.S. sources as a strong supporter of the Iranian government of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The Iranian government has denied any involvement.